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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 1448
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1484
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1436
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DUSHANBE 000502

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SUBJECT: EU SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE BRIEFS ON MEETING WITH PRESIDENT RAHMONOV

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard E. Hoagland, Ambassador, EXEC, Embassy Dushanbe.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In a read-out of his just-concluded meeting with President Rahmonov, EU Special Representative for Central Asia Kubis said that a calm and confident Rahmonov undertook to improve (to a degree) Tajik elections, reassured his unreserved willingness to support coalition efforts in the war on terrorism, advocated strongly against any military action in Iran, expressed great exasperation with Karimov's Uzbekistan, and made clear his intention to balance his relations with large powers. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (SBU) The Ambassador met for 90 minutes March 15 with EU Special Representative for Central Asia Jan Kubis at the invitation of French Ambassador Pierre Andrieu. France is the contact embassy in Dushanbe for the EU.

FROM BASKET CASE TO ISLAND OF STABILITY AND GROWTH

¶13. (C) Kubis had just come from a nearly two-hour meeting with President Rahmonov, who characterized Tajikistan as stable and quiet, with good prospects for economic development. He listed Tajikistan and Kazakhstan as the two most stable states in the region, and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as the two poorest, needing the most international assistance and investment. Kubis told the Ambassador that, too, was his assessment, and marveled at the turn-around Tajikistan has made in the last five years.

"ELECTIONS WILL BE BETTER, BUT~"

¶4. (C) Rahmonov brushed off a request for his evaluation of the Tajik political scene looking toward the presidential election at the end of the year, claiming he had too many other priorities at this time to pay attention to politics this early in the game. He did note, however, that he believes he has genuine support throughout the country and will never "retire from an airport," alluding to former Kyrgyz President Akayev's escape to Moscow. Rahmonov also contrasted his solid support within the country to President Karimov's in Uzbekistan where, he said, only Moscow and Beijing are keeping Karimov afloat.

¶5. (C) Kubis said his message to Rahmonov on the presidential election, building on Rahmonov's own evaluation, was that his genuine support within Tajikistan gives him the opportunity to conduct a presidential election that will come closer to international standards - "We're looking for progress, not perfection." Should Tajikistan show real progress in the next election, it would gain increased respect and attention from the West. Rahmonov responded that the elections would be better, but wouldn't meet "you're your standards." He quipped, "If you can call those recent laughable elections in Afghanistan 'democratic,' you won't have too much right to criticize Tajik elections."

UNWAVERING SUPPORT FOR THE ANTI-TERRORIST COALITION

¶6. (C) According to Kubis, Rahmonov's described Afghanistan as stabilizing but with a long way still to go. Rahmonov said without any hesitation that Tajikistan "will continue to support the anti-terrorist coalition and will cooperate fully." Kubis said the question of a U.S. military base in Tajikistan to replace Karshi-Khanabad did not come up explicitly, but he was

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convinced Rahmonov was sending a clear signal that he would be open to considering such cooperation. (COMMENT: Rahmonov's formulation is very close to the wording he used with Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld in July 2005 and in October with Secretary of State Rice. END COMMENT.)

¶7. (C) Continuing on Afghanistan, Rahmonov said he wants to make a push for Afghanistan to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a full member. That would give three "small states" - Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan - voices to balance the three "big states" - Kazakhstan, and the dominant powers Russia and China.

"DO NOT INVADE IRAN"

¶8. (C) Kubis reported Rahmonov said Tajikistan's relations with Iran are stable. He admitted that Tajikistan had been leery of President Amadinejad at first, but has not yet seen any evidence that he is attempting to export his hard-line positions to Tajikistan. Rahmonov added he is not at all happy with Iran's nuclear ambitions, but he forcefully advocated against any military action against Tehran. He told Kubis, "Iran is not a house of cards like Iraq was. It is strong, relatively rich, and the population is generally unified and nationalistic. Further, with 10 million Iranians abroad, it has to be taken into consideration how many of them would be radicalized by a Western military assault on Iran."

"WHO CAN DO ANYTHING WITH UZBEKISTAN?"

¶9. (C) Rahmonov, said Kubis, went on at length, highly criticizing Karimov's Uzbekistan. He evidenced great exasperation that Tashkent is preventing regional integration. He expressed guarded hope that Uzbekistan's recent accession to the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) will mitigate some of Karimov's recalcitrance in the region because on June 1 Uzbekistan will have to begin meeting EEC standards on demining borders, visa regimes, and transportation links among members. Rahmonov also said he hopes Uzbekistan joins the Collective Security Treaty Organization because that would give Tajikistan a legal-entity forum to insist that Karimov stop using exiled

Tajik Colonel Khudoberdiyev as a threat against Tajikistan. But in the end, Rahmonov said, there's little hope for any improvement so long as Karimov sits in Tashkent.

"WE AREN'T ANYONE'S PUPPETS"

¶10. (C) Speaking of Tajikistan vis-`-vis the major powers, Rahmonov told Kubis, "We don't want to be puppets in anyone's hands. We know some are playing with us, but we want to keep all channels open. If we are treated honestly and with respect, we will respond equally." Kubis commented to the Ambassador he took this to mean that Rahmonov is reasonably cautious about Russia's full-court press. The Ambassador said his message to Rahmonov is that the U.S. does not play zero-sum games. We recognize Russia's natural interests in the region. At the same time, we want to ensure Tajikistan's sovereignty and independence and that it not become a less-than-sovereign satellite of any power. Kubis said that is exactly the same message he gave Rahmonov.

CALMER ABOUT "COLOR REVOLUTIONS"

¶11. (C) Kubis commented he had last talked with Rahmonov Fall 2005 in Paris and had found him then somewhat obsessed with "color revolutions." This meeting, Rahmonov was much more calm

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and self-confident. About "color revolutions," Rahmonov told Kubis, "We have to be vigilant, of course, but we understand they are caused mostly by economic issues."

TAJIKISTAN NEEDS A FULL EU MISSION

¶12. (C) The Ambassador commented he had recently seen an excellent read-out of DAS Bryza's consultations with the EU, and had been struck with the European comment that the EU is "ham-strung" disbursing its considerable assistance in Tajikistan by lack of personnel on the ground. He suggested to Kubis it might be time for Brussels to consider establishing a full mission in Dushanbe, given its assistance investment and given Tajikistan's emerging status as an island of stability and growth on Afghanistan's border. (NOTE: The EU currently has an "office" of only four people in Dushanbe headed by a working-level staffer. END NOTE.) Although his EU colleagues looked a tad pained, Kubis said he thought that was an excellent suggestion, and he would be glad to press it in Brussels, especially since it would help support "the corridor of reform."

He invited the Ambassador to Brussels, at his convenience, to brief on Tajikistan and the region.

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